

approved

senior tax credit task force

Minutes of the May 10, 2007, meeting

The Senior Tax Credit Task Force met on May 10, 2007, in the Tyson Room, Howard Building, 3430 Courthouse Dr., Ellicott City, MD, at 2 pm.

The following members of the task force were in attendance: Frank Chase, Ted Meyerson, Sara Hamer, Larry Lewis, Janice Bloodworth, Don Dunn, Colin Burke, Sue Buswell, Joel Yesley, Sharon Greisz, Pat Dornan, and Peter Rogers.

Robert Young and Howard Levenson from the State Department of Assessments and Taxation also attended.

Others from staff in attendance were Jeff Meyers and Diana Coll.

The meeting was open to the public and press.

Chairman Meyerson called the meeting to order at 2:06 p.m. and then introduced Mr. Lewis, a new member of the Task Force, and the two guests from the State Department of Assessments and Taxation. Mr. Young is the Associate Director and Mr. Levenson is in charge of assessments for Howard County. The Chairman also congratulated Ms. Hamer on her nomination for a position on the property tax appeals board.

Mr. Dunn made some comments about the recently published application form for the County senior property tax credit. He believes that the form is too lengthy and complicated, which discourages applicants. Mr. Levenson indicated that the first year would generate the most confusion. Repeat applicants would have less trouble with the form.

The Chairman announced that the next meeting would be about the application form and that someone from the Office on Aging, who had been trained by the Finance Department, would be on hand to assist the task force. Sample forms were distributed for review. The chairman would also like future meetings to cover reverse mortgages and the State structural deficit.

Mr. Young and Mr. Levenson took questions from the task force on property tax issues. Mr. Young noted that several counties have local supplements to the State Homeowner's Tax Credit. The state handles all of the administration for the other counties because their eligibility requirements are similar to the State's, but the State charges a fee for this service. About 50,000 people State-wide get a homeowner's property tax credit; 80% of them are 60 or older. It is possible that as many as 200,000 more people might be able to qualify. Howard County has relatively fewer households with credits because with have a smaller, affluent population.

Mr. Young pointed out that counties can also adjust the property tax burden by changing the Homestead cap and the tax rate. Mr. Young discussed the constitutional limits on a tax freeze or on things that have the same effect. The concept of

"curtilage" was discussed as was the method the State uses to calculate the administrative charges imposed on counties.

Ms. Greisz reported that 200 applications have been mailed to date and that 16 have been received from applicants. The Finance Department is willing to go to great lengths to assist applicants including attending Office on Aging events and visiting applicants at home if necessary. Post cards will be mailed, possibly in batches of 10,000, starting in a few weeks. The computer systems have been put in place and a FAQ is being compiled.

Mr. Young noted that, beginning next year, homeowners will need to apply for the Homestead credit at least once during the next several years. This is an effort to reduce the number of credits granted to those who are not qualified to get them.

The task force adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Meyers